

## Setting and Its Roles

### *from "Older Run"* by Gary Paulsen

This night had begun cleanly, wonderfully. It was midwinter, clear, fifteen or twenty below, a full moon—absolutely beautiful. I put Cookie on the front end and took three of the seasoned dogs and six of the pups, a total of ten dogs, counting Cookie.

. . . Twenty-five miles into the run, smoking through the moonlight, we came to a trestle<sup>1</sup> over an open rushing river. I had turned my head lamp off to let [the dogs] run in the moonlight, which they preferred, and was thinking ahead, way ahead of a place we were going to camp to rest the pups. It was one of the most beautiful places I had ever seen, a quiet brook kept open by small warm springs, winding through a stand of elegant spruce and tall Norway pines. It was a place to make you whisper and think of churches, and I liked to stop and sit by a fire, and I was thinking of how it would be to camp there and be peaceful when the dogs suddenly stopped.

Dead in the middle of the trestle.

I hit the brakes with my right foot and almost killed myself. Some maniac had come and stolen all the plywood from the trestle and when I jammed the two hardened steel teeth of the brake down instead of sliding on the plywood surface to a gradual stop, they caught on an open cross tie and stopped the sled instantly.

I, however, did not stop.

In a maneuver that would have looked right in an old Mack Sennett<sup>2</sup> comedy, I slammed into the cross handlebar with my stomach, drove all the wind out of my lungs, flew up and over the sled in a cartwheel, hit to the right of the wheel dogs, bounced once on the iron-hard cross ties of the trestle, ricocheted<sup>3</sup> neatly into space, and dropped twenty feet into a snow bank next to the river, headfirst, driving in like a falling arrow.

1. **trestle:** a framework built to support a bridge.

2. **Mack Sennett:** an early director of silent movies, especially slapstick comedies.

3. **ricochet:** to bounce off of a surface.